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ABSTRACT

Attitudes of black leaders and a general black population sample toward birth control and family planning issues were "Pro Birth Control" and "Genocide Fears." The leaders questioned held positions in twenty national black organizations, while the general population samples were taken from Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, and Charlotte, North Carolina. A significant difference was found on the "Pro Birth Control" scale, indicating that black leaders were more favorable toward birth control, a conventional vehicle for black improvement. Lack of difference on the "Genocide Fears" scale may indicate the pervasiveness of black alienation from the larger society. (Author/APM)

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BLACK FAMILY PLANNING: ATTITUDES OF LEADERS AND A GENERAL SAMPLE

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Running Head: Family Planning

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Black Family Planning: Attitudes of Leaders and a General Sample

Problem

The purpose of this study was to compare the attitudes of Black leaders in predominantly Black national organizations with a sample of Blacks in two cities on issues related to birth control and family planning programs. The context for such comparisons is the long-standing debate regarding the effects of birth control on the Black community. Black proponents of birth control have viewed it as a vehicle for Black social improvement (Murray, 1977). Black opponents have seen birth control as a potential threat to Black survival in the United States (Frazier, 1933).

Turner and Darity (1973) have demonstrated that there are significant difference in attitudes about birth control and family planning programs among Blacks on such variables as age, gender, region, and social class. There is reason to expect differences also between leaders and the general population of Blacks on issues related to Black well-being, such as birth control. Brink and Harris (1963, 1966) showed that over a three year period the relative positions of Black leaders and non-leaders changed with regard to strategies for achieving favorable social change for Blacks. Moreover, Turner and Darity (1976) found Black leaders to be non-supportive of most population policy proposals of the last decade. Underlying this lack of support for these proposed population policies was the belief that many such efforts place an excessive burden on Blacks for the solution to the population problems of

the country. We reasoned that this lack of support for population control policies might influence leaders' attitudes about family planning in general. On the other hand, we speculated that a general population of Blacks would be motivated more by needs for personal and family well-being than by politics or ideology and would, therefore, have more positive attitudes than leaders about birth control and family planning programs.

Method

The general Black sample of 1,886 respondents was drawn on a SES-stratified random basis in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania and Charlotte, North Carolina. These cities were chosen in order to provide for north-south regional comparisons. Except for region the two cities are similar in several important respects: both have socio-economically diverse Black populations; each has a Black population of approximately 30%; and each has permanently based family planning services available. The research design called for the separate (but simultaneous) interview of female index cases and their male partners. However, some of the women had no available partner, which accounts for the fact that 53% of the sample was female. The mean age was 31, with a range from 16 to 44.

As should be expected, the leadership sample was purposive and different from the general sample in several respects. This sample consisted of 74 national or local leaders of 20 predominantly Black organizations. The names of these organizations and of most of the national leaders interviewed would be recognized by most adults in this country. The respondents described their

organizations as involved in activities that were aimed at social change or service to black communities. Women made up 41% of this sample, and the mean age was 41, with a range from 19 to 75. All regions of the country were represented among those interviewed.

Precoded interview schedules were used with each group of respondents. Both groups had interviews containing 32 identical agree-disagree items that tapped a wide range of attitudes about the situation and well-being of Black Americans and about birth control and family planning programs.

Results

The common attitude items for both groups were subjected to a factor analysis with varimax rotations. Items with minimal loadings on a single factor of .30 and highest loading compared to the other factors were considered. Two of the five factors derived in the best solution related to birth control and family planning programs. Inspection of the high loading items on each factor lead us to descriptive labels for the scales.

Fears of Genocide This factor accounted for 14% of the variance. The items as a group seem to tap fears about survival in relation to reducing population size.

1. As the need for cheap labor goes down, there will be an effort to reduce the number of blacks. (.57)
2. As blacks become more militant, there will be an effort to decrease the black population. (.55)
3. The survival of black people depends on increasing the number of black births. (.44)

4. Birth control programs are a plot to eliminate blacks. (.51)

Pro Birth Control This factor accounted for 11% of the variance, and the general interpretation is that the items suggest positive attitudes about fertility control and birth control education.

1. If a woman is pregnant and does not want a baby, an abortion is acceptable. (.45)
2. Sterilization is an acceptable method of birth control. (.35)
3. Pregnancy and birth control should be taught in a course on preparation for marriage in the junior and senior high schools. (.30)
4. Elementary and secondary schools should give sex education as part of their programs. (.30)

The difference between the leaders and the general sample on these two factors was tested by ANOVA. The ANOVA was undertaken with and without education covaried. Studies have shown that the SES index can have a strong influence on one's opinions and personal views (Turner and Wilson, 1976). It was assumed that covarying education would correct for extraneous variability in the dependent measures before assessing the effect of the independent variables (i.e. groups) on the Pro Birth Control and Fears of Genocide factors (Campbell and Stanley, 1963). The covarying of education produced no additional statistically significant findings. The findings obtained from ANOVA without education covaried are not seriously threatened by extraneous variability due to this

particular SES index.

Based on the ANOVA, a statistically significant difference was found on the Pro Birth Control Scale only. Inspection of the factor score means of the two groups indicated that contrary to our prediction, the leaders had more positive attitudes toward birth control (consult Table 1). Although the leaders did have higher mean factor scores on the Genocide Fear Scale (as we predicted), this difference did not reach significance.

Conclusions

The group differences found on the Pro Birth Control Scale support the conclusions of Turner and Wilson (1976) that the ideological perspectives of Blacks are directly related to their status in the social system. Historically, Black advocates of birth control have been the more conservative, and the more socially and economically stable element of the black community (DuBois, 1932). Presently, the fertility rate of the black middle class is below replacement level (Coale, 1968), suggesting widespread usage of birth control and family planning methods. The leaders in this study were certainly of higher social status and probably more upwardly mobile than the general sample. Among the general black population birth control usage may have increased sharply due to economic pressures, but increased usage among the general sample of blacks appears insufficient for a pro birth control attitude. The finding of the present study also suggests that the Black leadership of the country is more inclined toward the use of conventional avenues of upward mobility than are most Blacks.

The fact that the leaders and the general sample were not significantly different on the Genocide Fear Scale could be alarming. It may suggest the pervasiveness of Black alienation from the larger society. However, understanding the varying foundations for such fears must be the task of future research.

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T A B L E 1

Mean and Standard Deviation for Groups

on the Two Factor Derived Scales

	Pro Birth Control		Genocide Fears	
GROUPS	M	SD	M	SD
Leaders	.37	.49	.05	.74
General Black Sample	.01	.75	.00	.84